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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, the sun has finally decided to show itself, after a week of mostly rain and cool temperatures. About the only good things that the rain helped me out with was my lawn needed the water and I didn't have to go to work at the golf course. Well, I could have worked, but I was beat; and there was just enough cold and rain to be a non-incentive to go in! Yup, it's tough getting old[er]! Well, not in mind, just the body!

Lots to talk about, if you're in the mood these days. Yes, the banks that got bailout packages "passed" their recent "stress" tests. Wow, are you impressed? They had better pass them! But, how about the general public? How about giving us a stress test and see how well we do! Like there's a real lot of decision there, right?! People losing their jobs left and right - which means less or no money being poured into the economy. That makes sense, duh! Local and state government are losing money? Sure, raise taxes more! Jack up the price of everything, we have a surplus of cash laying around! We're in for one helluva roller coaster ride, you can count on that!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
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Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone and it's time to dig and see if there are enough messages in the newsgroup to make a decent column...

Nope. There are more than there were last week, but still not enough to make an interesting column. I'll put 'em aside for next week.

It's going to be a short column this week, because my back is bothering me. It sucks getting old, ya know that? It's not a major issue, it just aches and spasms once in a while. I know that if I spend too much time sitting up I'm going to end up paying for it.

Anyway, one of the things I want to talk about today is the ’banking health report’ issued this past week that says basically that, although most of the banks they looked at are doing okay, they’re still going to need an infusion of cash to keep going. And we’re talking BILLIONS here, not pocket change.

Okay, I can accept that. Things are tough right now. But I remember back in the ’good old days’ when there was only one way to increase your funds if you were a business, and that was to treat your customers better. The conventional wisdom was that if you gave your customers a reason to do business with you, they would. Even as early as the 1980’s, when people stopped putting money in banks because times were tough, banks raised their interest rates on savings and CDs and even found ways to make checking accounts a better deal. Giving ’em a ’deal’ was a good way to make sure your business had its best chance at survival. If your customers made out well, you would make out well.

But it guess it ain’t the ’good old days’ no more... Not judging by the way the banks are acting.

First, they tell the government that they’re in dire straights and need money to keep the entire financial system from collapsing. So we give it to ’em. Without so much as a ’thank you’, they took it. And you’d think that would have been that. The billions of dollars, after all, in conjunction with tightening their corporate belts, should have solved most, if not all, of their problems, right? Yeah, I would have thought so too.

But that belt-tightening has taken a rather unexpected turn. The corporate gurus still got their salaries (and wait ’till next month when it becomes apparent that they’ve not only gotten their ’usual’ salaries but have actually gotten raises in a disturbingly large number of cases), but have gotten incredible bonuses. Maybe it’s just me, but I remember when a bonus was a sort of reward for having gone above and beyond what you were expected to do; for doing a better job and being even more of an asset than you were expected to be when you were hired. Whatever happened to THOSE days? What happened to being responsible for your own actions? 20 years ago, a corporate executive who’d lead a company to a multi-billion dollar loss would have been booted out the door without so much as severance pay. Today, we offer them multiple millions of dollars despite the fact that they’ve failed miserably and haven’t shown the interest or ability to reverse the trend.

But that’s okay, right? They can always get more money from the government. Perhaps what NASA and FEMA and the Social Security Administration should ask for a bail-out. Can you imagine what NASA could do with and extra 50 billion dollars? What natural emergencies could FEMA be ready for with an extra $50,000,000,000.00? Social Security? Imagine an extra fifty billion dollars in Social Security and Medicare!

Oh, but that’s ’special’ money! It’s supposed to be FROM the people, not FOR the people, I guess. Just to put it on context, by the way, 50 billion dollars is about $150 dollars for every man, woman and child in the country right now. Now, right now, a hundred and fifty bucks a piece may not sound like a HUGE amount, and many of us would give it freely in order to help, but you’ve also got to consider that that’s on top of your ’regular’ taxes, and on top of THIS one, there are going to be others piled on.

"Oh?" you say? You didn't realize that this was going to be on top of your regular taxes? Where do you think they're going to get this 'extra' money from?

The other thing I want to mention is the talk that's brewing about picking a Supreme Court Justice. As I said last week, Associate Justice Souter is retiring. It now falls to President Obama to choose a replacement. Despite the mis-steps that lead to the nominations of such 'heavyweights' as Harriet Miers for Associate Justice in the last administration, the conservatives are making noise about who the President should nominate and who/what he should not. Y'know what guys, the liberals won the election. You need to sit down and shut up for the next four years where things like this are concerned.

The discussion does, however raise some important and interesting points. SHOULD a Supreme Court Justice be, of necessity, a Judge? The answer, evidently, seems to be no. It's not a necessity that a Justice be a Judge. That's why they're not called Judges but Justices.

What IS important, is that a nominee be intelligent and cognizant of the Constitution. I'm not going to get into a debate about 'legislating from the bench' or 'activist judges', but anyone who is asked to interpret the Constitution should be intimately familiar with it and have an understanding of not only the intent of the authors of the Constitution, but how it relates to today's government and citizenry.

It's a pity that the President's schedule is so full these days. As a former professor of Constitutional Law, he'd be an ideal candidate. [chuckle]

Yes, yes, I know that would violate the idea of separate arms of government. Mingling the Executive branch with the Judicial. Checks and balances, don't ya know. Heck, we've all seen what happens when one branch rides roughshod over one or both of the other two.

The bottom line here is not about 'activist judges' or 'liberal elite' or anything else. It's about balance. When no one branch can over-ride the other two, you can be pretty sure that they're... if not doing their best, at least not ganging up on the REST of us.

That's it for this week, kids. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they're saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - StarCraft II Beta Test!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""" New Leisure Suit Larry!
                                   Van Halen, Guitar Hero!
                                   And more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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StarCraft II Beta Test: Ready, Set, Click!

Care to opt-in early for the StarCraft II beta test period? Blizzard just stamped its World of Warcraft news feed with a new post detailing the steps necessary to make it so, if you'd like a shot at a golden ticket.

Head over to the "Beta Profile Settings" page in your Battle.net account management interface - you'll need a Battle.net account if you don't have one - and walk through the new beta "opt-in" procedure (basically a system-spec snap-grab so Blizzard can ensure you're not planning to test running Windows on WINE in Linux on a 486-something-or-other).

Only downside? You'll have to download an app to run the info-pull. Well, that, and Blizzard's a little vague on what "other information" refers to in the sentence "includes such information as how much RAM you have, available hard drive space, your graphics card and driver, and other information about your system." Will we trust 'em anyway? Probably.

Tired of opting into Blizzard's sneak previews proactively? Run the new process once and you'll apparently have the option to volunteer for future betas as well. Easy enough.

Note that signing up now is still a gamble. Per the StarCraft II Beta FAQ, "once you've successfully uploaded a beta profile, the associated Battle.net account is added to a pool of *potential* beta testers."

No word (yet) on whether this covers all eventual intended platforms, i.e. both Windows as well as OS X.

First to test when they flip the switch? North America, Australia, and New Zealand, says Blizzard.

Hands On with Star Trek: DAC Game

If this week's release of the Star Trek film has whet your appetite for all things Federation, you should definitely check out Star Trek: DAC, launching for Xbox Live on May 13. The game is not - repeat not - continuation of the movie narrative; rather, it's a multiplayer ship-to-ship combat game with a retro style, top-down view.

Star Trek: DAC lets up to 12 online players for game play, or you can play locally with bots. It pits the Federation against the Romulans in three team vs. team-battle situations: Deathmatch, Conquest (King of the Hill), and Assault (an offense/defense situation where each force takes turns at both options). The Conquest mode has teammates working together to take over bases and strategic points on the map, while Assault mode forces players to coordinate defensive strategies.

Both sides have their choice of three different ship types, each with

special weapons and skills. Flagships, like the Enterprise, are large ships that pack a punch but are quite slow, while Bombers and Fighters are faster but not as durable.

Combat is pretty straightforward (see enemy/shoot enemy), but there are various power-ups to be found around the battlefield, sort of like the question mark boxes in Mario Kart. One combat wrinkle I especially liked was the escape pod. If your ship is destroyed, you are given the chance to eject into a small, fragile escape pod. If you can make it out of there in 8 seconds without getting shot, you get to "respawn" quicker than you would otherwise, keeping some of your power-ups. Be warned: with 12 players game play can definitely get pretty chaotic, so it might be a good idea to get a little practice locally before stepping up to online play.

The developers were not willing to share what "DAC" stands for, but they hinted that if you play through the game, all would be revealed.

Star Trek: DAC will cost 800 Microsoft Points, or about $10.

Van Halen Confirmed for "Guitar Hero"

Activision Blizzard is releasing three new music-based video games this year - "DJ Hero," "Guitar Hero 5" and "Band Hero" - and has confirmed that "Guitar Hero: Van Halen" is on tap.

The company provided few details on any of the games. "DJ Hero," which previously was confirmed, still doesn’t have a full set list in place, but the company has released new details about the controller. It will be a single turntable device with three colored buttons similar to the five fret buttons featured on "Guitar Hero."

"Band Hero" is positioned as a more family-oriented version of "Guitar Hero," focusing on top 40 hits. "Guitar Hero 5" is expected to be similar to all previous installments, but with the ability to "drop in and out of songs and change band members, instruments and difficulty levels on the fly."

The company confirmed the development of "Guitar Hero: Van Halen" to video-game blog Joystiq. It is scheduled for release in the second half of the year. No specific tracks were listed, but Activision said it will include music from guest bands including Queen, Weezer, blink-182, The Offspring and Queens of the Stone Age.

It’s not clear which band members will appear as avatars within the game.

Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust Review

Poor technical performance joins mindless, repetitive gameplay and a truly atrocious sense of humor in the PlayStation 3 version of Box Office Bust.

When the Leisure Suit Larry series was revived a few years back in Magna Cum Laude, its bawdy, over-the-top humor and minigame-heavy action

seemed geared to capture a new generation of gutter-minded gamers. Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust seems geared to offend, bore, or frustrate anyone who makes the mistake of playing it. The game's shocking sense of humor has all but forsaken wit and cleverness, choosing instead to inundate you with a constant stream of ham-fisted innuendo and spray-and-pray vulgarity (if we say enough foul things, some of it's gotta be funny, right?). Box Office Bust is an intensely adult game, yet the depressingly simple gameplay features more repetition than a children's television show. Despite their simplicity, some of these tasks are actually difficult, thanks to poor platforming and fighting controls. As if the aggravatingly dull action and desperately perverse sense of humor weren't enough, the PlayStation 3 version of Box Office Bust has a number of visual problems that make playing the game even more frustrating. On top of that, it costs 50% more than the other versions. It's an inexcusable, insulting mess.

The star of Box Office Bust is Larry Lovage, the protagonist from Magna Cum Laude and nephew of legendary lounge lizard Larry Laffer. Summoned to his uncle's movie studio to help sniff out a saboteur, the young Larry arrives in a flurry of disgusting and lewd comments. This storm does not abate throughout the whole game, and you are subjected to a wide spectrum of vulgarity, including (but not limited to) scatological jokes, bestiality gags, and esoteric sexual slang. Most of the humor tries to be shocking, but it just ends up feeling like someone spent a few days on the Internet tracking down the nastiest stuff he could, and then transformed it into a script. This isn't to say you won't be shocked; Box Office Bust contains some of the foulest dialogue you'll hear in a game. But most of it is far from entertaining, let alone funny.

This is fitting, however, because most of the game isn't fun. A lot of your time is spent running around movie lots ad nauseam, and hijacking the herky-jerky golf carts doesn't make it more fun, just faster. The detailed environments have a brightly colored cartoony aesthetic befitting a Looney Tunes game, which at least makes the endless running hither and thither a bit more bearable. Unfortunately, the PlayStation 3 version has a lot of trouble loading these textures quickly, so you'll often be treated to pixelated scenery that seems like a throwback to Larry's mid-90s heyday. The frame rate is often choppy, and combined with the abundant screen tearing, these visual issues really put a strain on you. But the real strain kicks in when you attempt one of the many aggravating platforming sections. Larry can jump, double-jump, and wall-jump, and is forced to do so quite often. The controls are floaty, so you'll have to be careful when setting up your jumps lest you send Larry over a ledge to his doom. He also loves to grip onto walls, preparing for a wall jump. More often than not, however, this gecko imitation will mess up your intended jump, and you'll have to try again. The ability to move the camera or switch into first-person view makes jumping puzzles more manageable, but whether or not the camera will respond in a given situation is a crapshoot.

When you're not struggling with this awkward platforming, you may be forced to grapple with the awkward combat. Larry can punch, kick, and block and can perform a magical-pirouette-knockdown attack, but again, the controls aren't responsive. You may easily pirouette your enemies to the ground, or they might gang up on you and make it difficult for you to move. Standing your ground and duking it out is an exercise in frustration, making the best strategy a combination of running around, pirouetting, and kicking your enemies while they're down. There are also some shooting and horse-riding sequences that aspire to mediocrity, and they round out a suite of action elements that are boring at best and

infuriating at worst.

There are some mildly entertaining minigames, but they are relatively scarce and come with their own set of problems. After you complete one of the dream sequences in which Larry actually lives the movie he's acting in, you get to direct the final scene. You do this by choosing which of the three cameras to focus on as the scene is acted out. Switching cameras in time with the action and dialogue cues is a neat challenge, and the cameras will often reveal funny happenings just off the set. The problem is, to do really well you have to listen to the dialogue, which is a trial in and of itself. The other notable minigame happens when Larry is trying to seduce one of the many women around the lot. The dialogue here is some of the best (morbidly amusing) and worst (absolutely atrocious) that the game has to offer. Though you can get some good laughs out of these conversations, you'll have to endure some pretty bad stuff. When you are successful (you literally cannot fail), Larry takes the woman back to his skeezy trailer. Congrats?

Not really. Though Box Office Bust wears out the bottom of the dialogue barrel by scraping it so vigorously, it barely scratches the surface of sexual content. All you see during the much-ballyhooed act is the suggestive rocking of Larry's trailer. Not that you'd really want to see what is going on. All the women in the game are downright ugly, even by cartoon sexy-lady standards. Weird eyeballs, disproportionate features, and wonky shading effects wreak havoc on their faces, and many seem to be smuggling overinflated rugby balls beneath their skin, which makes them more freak show than pinup girl. This is bizarrely fitting, though, because the idea of any woman bedding Larry after hearing his obscene come-ons is truly frightening.

Perhaps the greatest peril you'll face when playing Box Office Bust is that, after being so heavily bombarded with such repulsive dialogue, you might find yourself tempted to repeat some of the things Larry says to your friends or family. Don't. Keep your mouth shut and get rid of the game ASAP. Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust is a cesspool of foul language and ugly personalities. The terrible gameplay is stretched thin over hours and hours of redundant, repetitive quests, and the PlayStation 3 version costs $29.99, while the other versions are only $19.99 (do technical problems cost extra?). The one good thing you could say about Leisure Suit Larry is that it aims high: by relentlessly degrading men and women alike it transcends mere misogyny and insults us all equally and without prejudice.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

FTC Looks at Google-Apple Board Ties

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission has launched an inquiry into whether the ties between the boards of Apple Inc and Google Inc violate

antitrust laws, the New York Times reported on Monday.

The FTC has already notified the companies of the inquiry the report said, citing people briefed on the matter.

Google Chief Executive Eric Schmidt and former Genentech CEO Arthur Levinson are directors of both companies. Under federal antitrust law, a person is not allowed to sit on the board of two companies if it decreases competition between them.

Both Apple and Google declined to comment.

The two companies compete directly or indirectly in a number of areas, the most obvious being the fast-growing smartphone market.

Apple’s iPhone has been a huge hit for the company and is key to its future growth prospects. Google’s Android operating system is used on T-Mobile’s G1 smartphone.

In addition, the companies are both major rivals of software giant Microsoft Corp.

Separately, the U.S. Justice Department is also making inquiries about a class action settlement that Google reached giving it the right to digitize and sell entire libraries, according to experts on digitization.

Last week, U.S. President Barack Obama appointed Schmidt to the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, a 20-member group that will help formulate policy on areas where understanding of science and technology is important.

North Dakota Supreme Court Upholds Internet Provider Probe

North Dakota’s Supreme Court says the attorney general may continue a probe into the marketing practices of an Internet service provider.

Simple.net Inc. of Mesa, Ariz., has tried to block investigations by North Dakota and other states. It contends the investigations are barred because of a settlement between the company and the Federal Trade Commission.

In a unanimous ruling, the North Dakota Supreme Court says the FTC agreement does not prevent the North Dakota attorney general from looking into Simple.net’s business practices.

Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem got complaints about Simple.net because the company was sending out incentive checks.

When customers cashed the checks, they started getting billed almost $20 a month for Internet services. Stenehjem says the sales pitch was misleading.

Sun Micro: We May Have Broken US Anti-Bribery Law

Sun Microsystems Inc. may have broken anti-bribery laws with its actions

in an unspecified location outside the United States, a revelation that would-be acquirer Oracle Corp. knew about before inking its $7.4 billion takeover deal.

It’s unclear what Sun’s admission Friday will mean for the company.

Sun said in a regulatory filing that it found "potential violations" of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, a law that prohibits U.S. companies from bribing foreign government officials to drum up business.

Sun wouldn’t say what happened or where it happened, only that it "took remedial action" and alerted the Justice Department and the Securities and Exchange Commission, both of which are investigating.

If a violation is found, the punishment can range from a fine to criminal charges to even a ban on working with the U.S. government. The government is a major source of Sun’s revenue. Sun declined to comment beyond the filing.

Oracle said in its own filing with regulators that it learned of the possible violations before signing its agreement to buy Sun last month.

The deal is expected to close this summer and shouldn’t face antitrust objections because the companies have very little overlap. A takeover by Sun’s previous suitor, IBM Corp., which Oracle beat out in bidding for Sun, would have been more complicated.

Oracle wants Sun because it’s trying to assemble its own one-stop technology shop, similar to what IBM and HP have, to sell services, software and hardware.

Microsoft’s Windows 7 Test Implies Holiday Launch

Microsoft Corp. has released a near-final version of the Windows 7 operating system that adds a few new features, including a way to run Windows XP applications.

The Windows 7 "release candidate" was made available to a large group of technology-savvy testers Thursday and will be ready for anyone to download and try out starting Tuesday. The release candidate is typically the version used by Microsoft’s corporate customers to test how the new system will work for them. Software developers, hardware makers and other partners also base their next-generation products on this version because they trust that it’s stable and close to finished.

Microsoft published the Vista release candidate about five months before the final version went on sale to consumers. If Windows 7 were to follow the same trajectory, it could be available by the start of October. Officially, Microsoft expects to start selling Windows 7 by the end of January 2010, but has said this week that it is possible it could launch in time for the holiday shopping season.

The software maker is counting on Windows 7 to win over businesses that put off upgrading to Vista, which got off to a rough start because it didn’t work well with many existing programs and devices.

And Microsoft drew criticism from consumers when many computers

advertised beforehand as "Vista capable" were actually too weak to run Vista’s highly touted new interface and other features. People who wanted to upgrade Windows XP computers found their graphics cards and other components weren’t up to the task.

The new system is already set up for a smoother debut because it shares much of Vista’s underlying technology, which means hardware and software makers have had more than two years to catch up to a more demanding set of requirements. And Microsoft has pushed the notion that the high-end version of Windows 7 will run on many more computers than Vista, including tiny, low-powered laptops called netbooks. Today, Microsoft sells Windows XP, a much less profitable version of its operating system, to PC makers like Dell Inc. and Hewlett-Packard Co. to install on netbooks.

On Thursday, Microsoft revealed that the basic requirements for running a high-end version of Windows 7 aren’t much different from those needed to run the bulkier versions of Vista. However, critics said the Vista requirements for memory and other components should have been set higher, and Microsoft says Windows 7 is better at managing memory and not bogging down less-powerful machines.

Microsoft unveiled a few new features in the release candidate that didn’t exist in the January beta, including something called "Windows XP Mode." The feature, available for the release candidate as a separate download, will let people run many XP-era programs from a Windows 7 computer.

The release candidate also adds a way for people to access music and other media files stored on their home PC over the Internet from other Windows 7 machines.

Windows 7 Raises Complaints from Rivals

Microsoft Corp’s next version of Windows is stirring fresh complaints of anticompetitive behavior from rivals who say the new version of the operating system gives unfair advantage to Microsoft’s Internet Explorer browser, the Financial Times reported.

"Our initial review suggests this is a blatant use of the Windows operating system to change the market dynamics of browser usage," Mitchell Baker, chairperson of Mozilla, developer of open-source Firefox browser, told the paper.

No-one at Microsoft could immediately be reached for comment.

Opera, the Norwegian browser company, echoed Mozilla’s complaints about Windows 7, the paper said.

Microsoft had earlier said users will be able to turn off key programs like Internet Explorer, making it easier to use other browsers.

Microsoft is scheduled to respond to European Union antitrust regulators in a hearing next month on charges it sought to thwart rivals by tying the company’s Web browser to its Windows operating system.

Hackers Taking Advantage of Windows 7

Microsoft said Thursday that cybercriminals are already hawking booby-trapped versions of just-released Windows 7 operating system software.

"It's so important for customers to get their copies of Windows from a trusted source," Joe Williams, general manager, Worldwide Genuine Windows at Microsoft, said in an interview posted at the company's official website.

"In the last few days we've seen reports of illegitimate distributions of the release candidate of our latest Windows operating system, Windows 7, being offered in a way that is designed to infect a customer's PC with malware."

A nearly-final version of Windows 7 made its world debut on Tuesday, giving people a chance to tell Microsoft what they love or hate about the new-generation operating system.

Microsoft is making Windows 7 Release Candidate (RC) available as it puts finishing touches on the operating system that will replace Vista.

The US software colossus has touted anti-piracy protections it built into Windows 7 to thwart the spread of illegal copies of the operating system.

Windows 7 anti-piracy guards build on technology built into Vista, according to Williams. For example, pop-up boxes will warn people when unauthorized copies of software are spied on computers.

"With Windows Vista, we made significant strides in reducing the threat pirated copies posed to customers, our partners and Microsoft software, and we anticipate we'll do even better with Windows 7," Williams said.

Microsoft decried software piracy as a pervasive problem that costs the world economy more than 45 billion dollars annually and exposes users to risks of identity theft, system crashes, and data loss.

Williams said Microsoft research shows that as many as a third of the company's customers worldwide may be running counterfeit copies of Windows.

"We see many cases of customers who wanted to buy genuine software and believed they did, only to find out later that they were victims of software piracy," Williams said.

Windows operating systems are used in about 90 percent of the world's computers, according to industry figures.

Spam Down But "Zombie" Armies Growing

Hackers appear to be beefing up armies of "zombie" computers to recover from a major hit scored in the battle against spam email, according to software security firm McAfee.

A McAfee report said that during the first three months of this year, nearly 12 million new computers were added to the ranks of machines infected with "malware" that lets cybercriminals use them to spew spam.

The ominous news came with word that the amount of spam dropped 20 percent during the same period, evidently as a result of the elimination of a "McColo" spam-generating operation late last year.

The rate of spam email dropped from an average 153 billion daily last year to 100 billion a day in March, according to the McAfee report released Tuesday.

"Seems the bad guys are attempting to recover from last November?s takedown of a central spam-hosting ISP by rebuilding their army," researchers said in a McAfee Threats Report for the first quarter of 2009.

The United States unseated China as the country with the most "botnet-infected" computers, accounting for 18 percent of the world’s "zombie machines" as compared with China’s 13.4 percent, according to McAfee.

Australia "rocketed" to third place on the list with 6.3 percent of the world’s zombie computers after not even being it into the Top 10 list at the end of last year.

"The Land Down Under is proving to be fertile ground for zombie recruiting," McAfee researchers wrote.

Despite the international nature of botnets, spammers seem to prefer sending the unwanted email from the United States, which McAfee said was the source of 35 percent of the messages as compared to 7.3 percent from second-place Brazil.

Cybercriminals are also increasingly rigging legitimate websites to sneak viruses onto visitors’ computers, according to McAfee.

Threat researchers reported discovering in March more than 800 new versions of a Koobface virus tailored to attack users of hot social-networking website Facebook.

"Servers hosting legitimate content have increased in popularity with malware writers as a means for distributing malicious and illegal content," McAfee reported.

Cybercrooks have "deeply compromised" computers at key Russian and Eastern European corporations and government agencies, according to McAfee.

"The Internet knows no geographical boundaries," researchers said in the report. "It is now apparent that cybercriminals will attack any target of opportunity they can find."

Spam levels are the lowest the world has seen in two years, but are expected to rise.

"The question is not whether spam will return to previous levels, but rather when it will return," McAfee said. "There is data regarding new zombie and botnet creation that suggest the time may not be too far in the future."

Mini Monitor Can Be A Useful Desktop Annex (Review)

When you're surfing the Web, editing photos, listening to MP3s and tweeting, it's easy to run out of real estate on your computer display. If only you had a little extra screen - like a digital kid brother - that could show an auxiliary program like a Twitter application.

Now you do. All hail the mini monitor.

These diminutive displays are quite helpful with everyday computing tasks but take up less desk space than a full-sized monitor you might use as a second screen. And you don't need a special slot in your PC to connect the miniature displays. A basic USB connection handles it.

I tried a $130 model from Nanovision Co. called the Mimo UM-710. The unit's display is 6 inches by 3 1/2 inches - 7 inches diagonally - and sits on a small, adjustable stand. It can be oriented to a vertical or horizontal position, depending on what best suits what you're using it for.

Unlike an iPhone and some other devices, the Mimo does not automatically detect whether you've put it into a horizontal or vertical setting. You need to adjust that yourself in the on-screen preferences for the device, but it takes only a couple of clicks.

Once it's in place, you can just drag items onto the mini-monitor from your main computer display. So if you set the little display as an extension of the right side of your desktop, then you can just pull a program window to the right edge of your big screen and it will appear on the Mimo. (Using it as an extension on the left, top or bottom of the main screen is also possible.)

To get started I installed the little monitor's drivers from the included CD, then plugged the Mimo into a USB port on my desktop computer running Windows XP Home. The unit also works with Windows Vista and Mac OS X.

A small Mimo icon soon appeared in the bottom right-hand corner of my desktop, in the taskbar, to let me know the unit was ready for use.

It was fun to launch various applications to see which ones would benefit from the Mimo's extra patch of LCD.

First up was Adobe Photoshop, something I use daily. I'm constantly revealing and hiding palettes that let you work with images, and I hate when these tools encroach on the picture I'm editing. Mimo was a great place to stash these items, though I found it best to keep the Mimo close to the main display so my eye didn't have to travel long distances from the palettes to the image.

Another Adobe product that worked well with the Mimo display was Premiere, my favorite video editing software. It wasn't practical to put either of the two video preview panels on the Mimo, as it would take them away from the timeline where the details of the editing take shape. But the Mimo was a good place for the audio mixer and effects controls, which see less activity.

The Mimo display also worked well as a holder for Windows Media Player. I could play an album and see my music library on the Mimo screen without encroaching on my Internet activity.

Perhaps the best use of the mini monitor was serving as a holder for Twitter applications such as Tweetdeck and Twhirl, which organize Twitter dialogues. I'm usually multitasking while tweeting, so the Mimo monitor provided the perfect compliment.

Other nifty uses for the Mimo are to have it serve as the poker table for the FullTilt.com game app or to display Yahoo Widgets such as an RSS reader or clock and
calendar.

Here are some things that are not practical for the mini-monitor annex: your e-mail client, a Web browser, a word processor. There's just not enough room to make good use of it.

The Mimo is available at the company's Web site, http://www.mimomonitors.com. This year D-Link Corp. is introducing a rival called the SideStage, with similar specs, though no price has been set.

Twitter Co-founder Says Company Not for Sale

The popular micro-blogging and social networking service Twitter is not for sale, one of the company's founders said on TV on Wednesday.

Biz Stone made the declaration in an appearance on the ABC show "The View."

When host Barbara Walters - mentioning rumors that Google Inc, Microsoft Corp and Apple Inc might be interested in acquiring the company - asked whether Twitter is for sale, Stone answered, "no."

"We're just getting started as I've said. The company is two years old, we have so much to do, so much product stuff to fix, and so much growing to do."

Twitter has been the subject of takeover speculation since the company turned down a $500 million acquisition offer by social networking heavyweight Facebook.

Twitter is a free service that allows people to send short, 140-character text messages to their network of friends. It has become something of a cultural phenomenon, with politicians, celebrities and athletes all signing up to send messages, or "tweets," to a growing audience of followers.

According to Nielsen Online, which measures Internet traffic, Twitter's website had more than 7 million unique visitors in February, compared to 475,000 in February 2008.

The company, based in San Francisco, California, is focusing on monetizing its service this year.

New Web Site for Michigan Seniors Is Launched

Michigan seniors can visit a new Web site to find information ranging from a guide to nursing homes to how to avoid scams.

State Attorney General Mike Cox on Monday announced the launch of http://www.seniorbrigade.com.

His office spent two years creating the site, which has the support of the AARP and the Area Agencies on Aging Association of Michigan.

"We want seniors to be empowered to defend themselves," Cox said during a news conference at the Tri-County Office on Aging.

Cox said the goal is to give seniors one place where they can learn more about health care, financial issues, consumer protection, veterans affairs and local events.

"There are 100 different Web sites that have information that helps seniors. But there’s no one place where seniors can go for specifically consumer protection," said Mary Ablan, director of the Area Agencies on Aging Association of Michigan.

The Web site’s home page features a video message from Cox, a Republican who is planning to run for governor in 2010. People who use the site can increase the font size if they have trouble reading the text. Cox said Michigan’s population of seniors is expected to double by 2030.

The project along with billboard advertising was paid for by Microsoft Corp., Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and the Foundation for a Stronger Michigan, a nonprofit originally formed by Cox in 2003 to fund the PayKids initiative with corporate donations. Billboards were posted along highways to warn parents who owe child support that Cox’s office was cracking down.

Billboards also will be used to get the word out about the senior Web site. Using private donations is helpful at a time of state government budget cuts, Cox said.

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